

Your Honor:

My name is Dawn Stafford. I'm Zachary Hutton's mother. As I begin to write this letter, I can see Zachary watching Flash on TV with his cat piled up on his lap. He's still fighting acne and has braces. He looks like a kid.

Zachary was doing so well in life. Before all of this happened, Zachary had been going to college, helping his dad on the farm, and taking care of his Mamaw. One minute of weakness and peer-pressure reignited his addiction issues. This time it was pills instead of marijuana. Zachary called me in tears to let me know he had messed up and was hooked on pills. Of course, I stepped up to help him right away. I took him to see his physician to make sure it was safe for him to try to self-detox. It was one of the most difficult things I've ever done but I helped him. He came to my house to stay. For about 10 days, Zachary went through withdrawals including panic attacks, throwing up, sweating, and lots and lots of crying. Zachary is working on his addition issues and is in regular conversations with a man with 14 years sobriety. I'm proud of the progress he's making.

The detox was at the same time he was getting threats from the man in California who was supplying the pills. Threats were made against him and his family. There was a threat to burn down his Mamaw's house, which is the address the packages were sent to. There's no doubt, he was afraid and had no idea how to get out of the situation he was in. He was indebted to someone he feared.

Even though Zachary lives with his dad, I've had to stay with him nearly every night for the past two months. He's wanted me with him every minute. Understandably, he's scared. Scared of prison and scared of retaliation. His car was damaged a few months ago with a bullet through the window and profanity written down the side. He's also remorseful for hurting others, especially his family. He's told me over and over that he's so sorry he put me through all of this. He's also embarrassed about what he's done that he hasn't left his house in over 2 months. I truly believe this is something he'll never, ever do again.

In my heart, I know Zachary isn't the typical young man who is charged with this type of crime. Zachary is intelligent and caring. I've seen him turn his car around on two occasions just to give a homeless person money. I've seen him offer to push a buggy for an elderly lady. I could give tons of examples just like those. I know I'm his mom and biased, but I know he has the potential to become a productive member of society. He wants to go back to college to finish his electricity program. He's so good at taking care of his Mamaw too. She's 83 and depends on Zachary for so many things.

I ask you to consider these things when you decide Zachary's sentence. I don't know what the options are but I ask you to be lenient. I've prayed many times for you to have a compassionate heart when deciding Zachary's fate. Many people in our lives are praying for that right now.

I love Zachary more than words can express. Please don't let a few months of bad decisions ruin Zachary's life. I know there must be consequences but I'm hopeful your ruling will be as minimal as possible. I just want him home where he belongs. I will continue to be his supporter through all of this.

Respectfully,

Dawn Stafford